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ABSTRACT

An approach to teaching geography and social studies in elementary schools that is based on integrating theories of learning into the classroom experience is presented. Specifically, the approach described utilizes essential thinking skills and Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognition in a question-asking framework to be used with literary selections. Cognitive, physical, and creative domains are exercised through activities planned to simulate, reinforce or extend life experiences exemplified in the literary work. A number of explanatory figures appear in the document. (DB)

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Systems Planning

Literature Response: An Appropriate Strategy for Teaching Geography and Social Studies in the Elementary School

by

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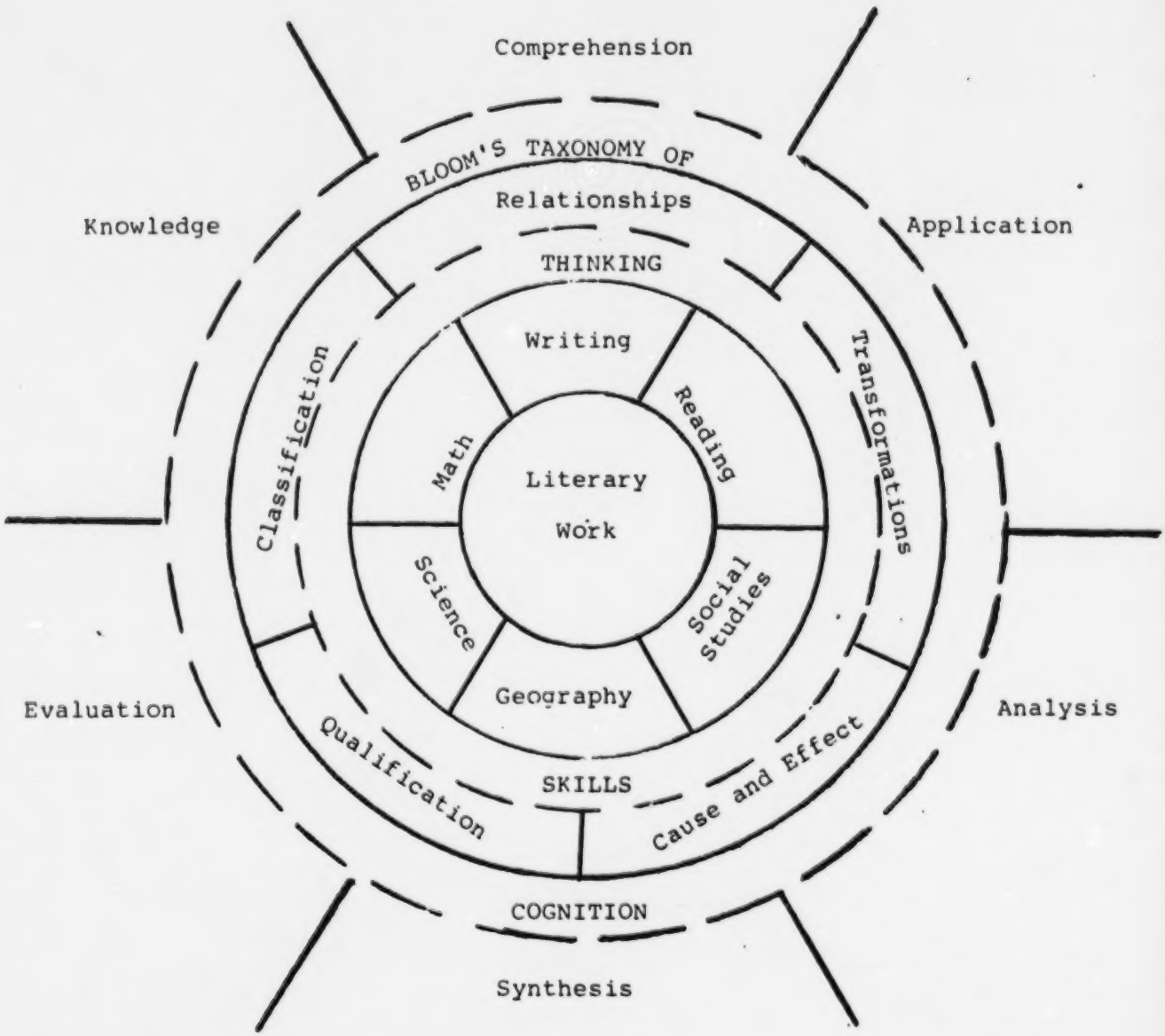
Recent literature presents a preponderance of evidence that questions the traditional instructional mode for teaching social studies and geography in the elementary school. The debate focuses on a development of historical understanding through time and chronology for dealing with history and global understanding. Secondly, the literature strongly suggests that continuing to develop curricula based on a widening horizens textbook format, as practiced over the past thirty-five years, may hamper rather than contribute to historical and global understanding for large numbers of students in our metropolitan school districts where the student populations reflect global mobility. And finally, the theories growing out of the literature response acquisition of historical and global understanding at all levels of the elementary school hold promises for a different instructional mode.

During the past three years, I have been attempting to integrate the developmental stages of Piaget, Bloom's taxonomy of cognition, and the new thinking skills research into a narrative approach for the teaching of social studies and geography that is based on a rich environment of literature. Briefly, the student population with which I have worked has included non-English speaking, black, and

lower socio-economic white children in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten public school settings. Phase I of my exploration included developing skill with question-asking based on Bloom's Taxonomy and providing children time every day to "read" a book and to individually tell me anything and everything they wanted to tell me about the book they have read. (This was done in small groups). In Phase II, I developed a question-asking framework based on Bloom that I felt corresponded with Presseisen's (1987) five major categories of essential thinking skills. Each day of the week, a higher level question was framed to introduce the literary selection, as well as to lead into subsequent questions at that level to be asked after the reading. In Phase III, I have endeavored to highlight the social studies and geography content and opportunities in these selection. Dramatizations, creative art, charts, graphs, creative group writings, and individual journals in response to readings supported with realia, maps, globes, encyclopedias, music, film strips, films, and oral histories have generated a lively interest in the globe as a symbol of the world and its inhabitants.

Finally, in Phase III, I have been able to direct the questions to fan all cognitive, physical, and creative domains. Most importantly, I have found a rich source for teaching the social studies and geography in a meaningful perspective for the participants to view history and vicariously experience events and places. Figure 1 (Systems Planning-Literature Response: An Appropriate Strategy for Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School) graphically reflects my intentions for structuring the learning environment of the kindergarten curriculum for which I am accountable.

Figure 1. SYSTEMS PLANNING. Literature Response: An Appropriate Strategy for Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School



Systems Planning

Weekly, a literary selection is made that may or may not correlate with the season, holiday, universal childhood event, etc. If possible, information is secured about the author and/or the piece of literature. Based on Bloom's taxonomy and the thinking skills research, a question-asking framework was used to develop a five-day reading/writing unit. Wherever possible, every area of the kindergarten curriculum is built around the selection during that week. Figure 2 (Question-Asking Framework for Literary Selections) shows the correlation and intent of questions for each day of the week.

Oral Response. To motivate and ignite student interest in the focus for the day's literary selection, realia, music, photographs or pictures, mystery boxes, the magic eye and similar techniques are used with the lead question for which students are to formulate an answer. On Monday and Tuesday, the entire text is read. Comments and exhibits of realia and other materials may be included as the text is being read, in addition to the anticipatory set created for motivating students to listen. The students request selections that substantiate their position or statement on Wednesday. On Thursday, a section is read to which students create a new beginning or ending, rewrite from another perspective, or produce in the form of poetry. Friday allows students the greatest range of expression because they can introduce problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, and creativity into their response with one hundred percent assurance that anything they say is acceptable.

When students have answered the focal question that has been specifically formulated to impose an essential thinking skill level,

Figure 2. Question-Asking Framework for Literary Selections

Day	Essential Thinking Skills	Bloom's Taxonomy	Key Words
Monday	Qualification	Knowledge and Comprehension	(1) Tell, (2) Explain, Identify, (1) Name, (2) Describe, List, (1) Locate, (2) Discuss, Repeat
Tuesday	Clafficiation	Application	(1) Calculate, (1) Exhibit, (1) Show, (2) Demonstrate, (2) Dramatize, Use, (2) Interview, (1) Illustrate
Wednesday	Relationship	Analysis	(1) Compare, (2) Contrast, Categorize, Organize, (2) Interpret, (2) Question, (1) Diagram
Thursday	Transformation	Synthesis	(1) Plan, (2) Propose, Produce, Develop, (1) Design, (1) Construct, (2) Predict, (2) Imagine, (1) Create
Friday	Cause and Effect	Evaluation	(2) Decide, (2) Select, (1) Measure, (1) Predict, (1) Choose, (2) Recommend

(1) Particularly useful in posing question on geography.
(2) Particularly useful in posing question on social studies.

subsequent questions at that same level of cognition are asked. Verbs or questions that will solicit demonstration of that action verb are embedded in the teacher's inquiry.

Written Response. Every effort is made to build the pre-writing/writing experience around the introductory question. Students are given materials with which they draw, illustrate, diagram, design, construct, and create a pictorial response to the question. Then, a written narrative is printed by the student explaining his individual graphic. Figure 3 (Sequence of Written Response By Students) indicates the written behavior requested from students that most closely parallels the question-asking framework. While students are engaged in the written response, I am conferencing with students as I move from among individuals, pairs, or triads.

As students complete their representations for today's focus, response groups are formed to share their pictoral and written text. Questions and opinions relating to the text being read are volunteered by response group participants. When all students have completed their work, the pages are assembled into a class exhibit, scrapbook, or maybe collected to build individual mini-exhibits of a child's demonstration of growth through repeated interaction with a selected literary work. The Appendix: Mini-Unit Lesson Plan shows the questions and written task developed to use with Lentil by Robert McCloskey.

Extension. During the week, aspects of the literary selection are incorporated into centers, and group instruction throughout the conscious planning of the learning environment.

Figure 3. Sequence of Written Response By Students

Day	Written Behavior That Most Closely Parallels Question-Asking Framework
Monday	1. Draw the main character. When you have finished your drawing, write the story. (Usually a crayon drawing with written text under picture or on back.)
Tuesday	2. Illustrate the primary setting for the book.
Wednesday	3. Diagram the ... Write about a short explanation of the diagram when you are finished.
Thursday	4. Design a blueprint for the proposed hospital... Write how the rooms will be used...
Friday	5. Illustrate the part of this book where you would most like to have been and write a story to go with your book.

Summary

After a thirteen-year absence from the public school environment, I resumed the teaching role with an enlarged conceptualization of the implications for striving to integrate theory and research with classroom applications. The content of early childhood curricula has primarily represented three areas of development: language, social, and math. Indications from recent reports in the literature enticed me to use literary works to bridge content and context rather than use literature to fit in with thematic units.

The system which I have described exploits the every intention of the author to depict characters, events, and locations in an informative narrative. It embeds essential thinking skills and Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognition in a question-asking framework to be used with the literary selection. Cognitive, physical, and creative domains are exercised through activities planned to simulate, reinforce, or extend life experiences exemplified in the literary work.

The results that I am seeing support my recommendations to build a better global understanding through literature, focusing on geographical and historical knowledge and understanding within that context.

Appendix. Mini-Unit Lesson Plan

Questions Based on Bloom's Taxonomy

for
Lentil by Robert McCloskey
developed by
Dr. Debbie Coonrod
Fort Worth Independent School District
February 27, 1989

Knowledge/Comprehension

IGNITE: This letter metal box has a special name. With it you can do something very special. Listen to the story to learn the answers.

1. Name the main characters.

2. Name the musical instrument Lentil owned and describe how it is played.

3. Explain why Lentil wanted a harmonica.

4. Explain why the townspeople considered Colonel Carter their most important citizen.

5. Describe what happened when the members of the welcome band looked up and saw Old Sneep sucking a lemon.

*6. Draw a picture of Lentil playing his musical instrument. Write a story about Lentil under the picture.

Analysis

IGNITE: Today, I have some things used by one of the characters in the story. Listen, so you can tell me more about Old Sneep.

1. Compare the personalities and contributions of the two school mates: Colonel Carter and Old Sneep.

2. What does Colonel Carter give to the city this trip that the people had been unable to afford?

3. What could you do that was just what Lentil did?

4. Name two things that happened in the story because Lentil played his harmonica as the train.

*5. Diagram the hospital that you think Colonel Carter will have built for the town. Label the different areas of the hospital.

Evaluation

IGNITE: Enthusiasm causes happiness and good work. Complaining causes grumpiness and bad feelings. What parts of the story would you have me read that show enthusiasm? grumpiness?

1. In you opinion, predict what Colonel Carter might do for Lentil.

2. What recommendations would you make to the townspeople to do the next time Colonel Carter comes to Alto, Ohio?

3. What would you like to ask Lentil if you could meet him?

4. Do you think it is important to make music? Why or why not?

*5. Make a picture of yourself playing your favorite musical instrument. Write the story under the picture.

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